

When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: “I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense. ¹¹ You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. ¹² My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. ¹³ And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. ¹⁴ However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, ¹⁵ and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶ So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

¹⁷ “After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. ¹⁸ I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. ¹⁹ But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. ²⁰ Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin— ²¹ unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: ‘It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.’ ” (NIV 84)

Theme: Stand Strong in the Resurrection

Our text for today takes place in the middle of huge ordeal—Paul having to stand trial because of his faith. The story starts three chapters before our text in chapter 21. Paul was finishing up his third missionary journey. He had taken up a collection for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. So he ended his trip by traveling to Jerusalem to give them that gracious gift from their fellow Christians throughout the world. When he first arrived in Jerusalem he met with James and the other leaders of the Christian Church in Jerusalem. At their urging, Paul and some of his companions purified themselves according to Jewish Law so they could enter the temple. When the seven days that

were required to purify oneself were over, Paul then went to the temple. But then some Jews from Asia Minor noticed Paul. Paul had visited their area multiple times on his missionary journeys. They didn’t appreciate Paul and the message of Christ. Plus they mistakenly thought that Paul had brought a Gentile in the part of the temple that only Jewish Males were allowed to enter.

So they incited a riot. They claimed that Paul was against Jewish laws and defiled the temple. Luke tells us that the whole city rushed into the temple to attack Paul. The Roman Tribune and his soldiers rushed in and stopped the crowd from beating Paul—thus saving his life.

Paul was arrested and bound with chains. They crowd shouted, **away with him!** But when he was on the steps of the temple, Paul convinced the Tribune to let him address the crowd.

Paul told the crowd the story of his conversion. At one time Paul persecuted Christians under permission of the High Priest. He went throughout the area arresting Christians and throwing them in Jail. But once, while on his way to capture some Christians in Damascus, Jesus appeared to him. He wasn’t dead, as Paul supposed, but alive. The teaching that Paul had vehemently attacked was actually true. Jesus brought Paul to faith. And he was baptized by Ananias. Jesus later told Paul, **I will send you far away to the Gentiles.**

This caused an uproar among the Jews. Once again to save his life, the Roman Tribune rushed Paul out of the Temple. He gave the command to have Paul flogged. But Paul appealed on behalf of his Roman citizenship. Since it was illegal to flog a Roman citizen, he was spared. The next day the Tribune wanted to know why the Jews were so upset with Paul. So he called together the Chief Priest and the Sanhedrin and put Paul on trial.

As he was making his defense in front of the Sanhedrin, Paul came up with a plan. He realized that he was standing before Pharisees and Sadducees. These two Jewish sects didn’t get along. The Pharisees followed all of the Old Testament as we know it today. So they believed in the resurrection of the dead, angels, demons, the afterlife and so on. since those teachings are clearly taught in books such as Job, Psalms, and Isaiah. The Sadducees, on the other hand, only followed the five books of Moses—the first five books of the Old Testament. So they denied the afterlife, the resurrection of the dead, angels, and so on. So Paul, looking to show the Roman Tribune that

he committed no crime against Romans law said, **I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.** An argument broke out between the Sadducees and the Pharisees, which escalated quickly. Paul was taken away so that he wasn't torn to pieces by the crowd.

That night 40 Jews made plans to ambush Paul and kill him. Paul's nephew heard of the scheme and alerted the Tribune. So the Tribune took 470 soldiers and led Paul up to Caesarea, the administrative center of the governor of Judea. There Paul was to stand trial before the governor. The Jews were to state their case to the governor—and were represented by a lawyer, named Tertullus. Tertullus accused Paul of inciting riots throughout the empire. He also called Paul the ringleader of a sect called the Nazarenes, after Jesus' hometown. Then finally we get to our text as we have it today. But just think of everything that led up to it.

Paul stood on trial because of his faith. He was attacked because he preached Christ. He was hated because the Jews didn't want to hear about Jesus and they rejected the audacity that someone rose from the dead. Sounds like today, to a certain extent. People today don't want to hear about Christ. They don't want to hear that someone died but rose from the dead. It's offensive to their reason. It's impossible so they reject it. And they mock anyone who would believe such a thing. "How could you be so stupid and gullible by believing something so foolish?" They say the same thing about some of Jesus' teachings. They mock and ridicule us when we reject evolution because God said he created the world by his word in six days.

Not only do they hate Christ because he's offensive to their reason, they hate his teachings because it's contrary to their way of life. People don't want to hear that they were sinful at birth. We think that we are pretty good—that there is a little bit of good inside each one of us. So it goes against nature when God says that we deserve to be punished forever simply because of who we are or that we are completely dead in our sins. People don't want to hear that the way they live their life is sinful. They call it bigotry when we God calls their wants and desires sinful. They want to live their lives the way they want to live. And if someone tells them otherwise, they are labeled as intolerant.

They don't want to hear Christ. They want nothing to do with his Word. They are offended by his teachings. So they put us on the trial in the court of public opinion. So what do we often do? Well, it's hard to always share our faith. It's hard to always stand strong in the face of adversity. So we cower. We cave under the pressure. We are almost embarrassed about our faith. We don't want our friends to know that we are Christians. We hide our faith from our co-workers. We don't want them to judge us. We don't want to get in an argument about religion. We don't want to offend anyone. And we don't want others to look down on us. Or mock us for what we believe. We come to the conclusion that it's just not worth it. So we don't talk about Christ or share our faith.

What did Paul do? He stood strong. He didn't back down. He didn't cower in the face of trouble. In fact before he got to Jerusalem a prophet named Agabus told him that he would be arrested in Jerusalem. Paul's companions urged him to avoid the city. But Paul responded, **I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.** When Paul stood before the crowd in the temple he talked about how Christ was alive and appeared to him. Before the Sanhedrin he confessed his faith in the resurrection of the dead. He did the same thing before Governor Felix in Caesarea. In verse 15 Paul said, **I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.**

Paul stood firm. He didn't back down. He knew that he didn't commit any crime by preaching Christ. So he was bold. And confessed his faith. Paul would do that throughout his life. He put his life in danger again and again. He was willing to die for Christ. And eventually, he did.

Why? How could Paul stand firm in the face of adversity and even death? He knew the power and promises of the Lord. For God promised Paul that he would go on to Rome and spread the gospel there. So he knew God would guard and protect him. Jesus would be with him every step of the way. God made such promises throughout his Word. For instance in Psalm 118 the Psalmist said, **The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?** Paul knew this well—God was with him, so no one could do him any real harm.

And so he confessed in Romans 8, **If God is for us, who can be against us?**

Paul also saw Christ. Jesus himself appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus and other times. He knew the power of the resurrection. He knew that Jesus rose from the dead. He had power over death. Jesus lives, so Paul would too. And so Paul knew that no matter what he would join his Savior and all his fellow believers in heaven forever. He had nothing to fear. So he stood strong in the resurrection. And he confessed his faith.

You too know the power of the resurrection. Jesus rose from the dead, and so will you. Jesus lives and so will you. Jesus will live in heaven forever, and so will you. So you don't have to be afraid of what man might do to you. They can't do you an real harm. Because even if they kill you, you will end up in a better place. Through faith you will live with Jesus. You will have a perfect life with our perfect Savior—free from sin, pain, and sorrow. Free from sinners who try to hurt or harm you.

And you know the power of the cross. Your sins were nailed to Jesus on that cross. Put on his shoulders so that he could suffer and die in your place. All of your sins have been paid for. All the times you failed to share your faith, when you have cowered in the face of persecution, when you bit your tongue instead of telling someone about their Savior—God has forgiven you through Christ. God accepted Christ's payment by raising him from the dead. Your sins have been removed and paid for. You stand forgiven before God. And so, because of the work of Christ, you know where you will be. You will be in heaven—forever with your Savior.

Therefore, **Stand firm; let nothing move you.** Man can do nothing to you. You have God on your side. They may mock you, take you to court, or even kill you. But you don't care. You will live with Jesus. You know this power of his death and resurrection. So you can stand firm and spread the Word. Like Paul—your hope is in the Lord and his resurrection and the eternal life he has won and given to you. Amen.